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SIPDIS

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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2018
TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: GSE ARRESTS 38TH CHRISTIAN LEADER

REF: ASMARA 429

Classified By: CDA Melinda Tabler-Stone for reason 1.4(d).

(C) A reliable Embassy source informed PolOff that GSE officials arrested Father Mengisteab of the Franciscan St. Anthony Church late August. He is reportedly being held in the Adi Abeto prison, a transit point for prisoners destined for the Wi'a military prison camp. The source was unsure why the GSE targeted Father Mengisteab but speculated it was because St. Anthony Church is known for selling religious trinkets, including rosary beads and other Catholic paraphanelia. Father Mengisteab's reported arrest coincides with current rumors that the GSE is invading households of Jehovah's Witnesses and confiscating anything of value. To date, there are 37 Christian pastors and other Christian leaders in prison, Father Mengisteab being the 38th. The arrest does not appear to be connected to the mass round-up of NGO employees (reftel), though is consistent with GSE habit of periodically arresting, detaining, and harassing religious officials.
TABLER-STONE